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CRITICISMS AND DISCUSSIONS.

AN INTERNATIONAL AUXILIARY LANGUAGE.

To the Editor of The Monist.

I am late in thanking you for your kind gift of the July *Monist* containing so many interesting articles on the international language. The cause of my delay is found in the many claims upon my time and particularly in the Second International Congress of Philosophy, which met at Geneva from the fourth to the eighth of September. I take pleasure in informing you that the Congress, after having heard my report on the progress of the notion of an international language, took the following action:

1. It endorsed the platform of the Commission on the adoption of an international auxiliary language.
2. It renewed my appointment as member of the Commission, which I had received from the first session of the Congress at Paris in 1900.
3. It appointed as a new member of the Commission Prof. Ludwig Stein, of Berne, who has long been in sympathy with our undertaking and who spoke in its behalf at the Congress.

It seems to me that these results are of sufficient importance to deserve communication to your readers and that they cannot fail to be interested in them.

If I did not fear to trespass on your indulgence I should add a brief reply to the objections raised by yourself and M. Arréat, polite and appreciative though they be. Permit me to say that they are all due to an incorrect or too narrow conception of the problem, or even to a simple lack of information. I will begin by taking up those which are based upon simple errors of fact.

You say, for example (p. 565), that the devotees of Volapük in different countries have had much difficulty in understanding one another. On the contrary, at the International Congress of Volapük, held in 1889, people of all countries conversed and held discourse in Volapük with great ease and understood one another perfectly. Volapük has even made marriages (I could cite the names) of persons of different nationalities who had no other com-

mon language. To-day Esperanto has accomplished still more completely what you regard as a miracle: this summer there have been several meetings of French and English Esperantists at Havre, Rouen, and Dover, and they all conversed continually in Esperanto with the greatest ease and familiarity. You may confirm this by inquiry of the British Consul at Havre, or of the Mayor of Dover.

Moreover, the unheard of and almost incredible fact was observed, that the English who spoke Esperanto had none of that characteristic accent which marks them forthwith when they undertake to speak French! This in response to M. Arréat who still doubts whether an artificial language can actually be spoken (p. 563)! If my personal testimony has any value I will record the following fact: I have never learned to speak Esperanto; I only read it. Now a Russian Esperantist came to my house one day unexpectedly and addressed me in Esperanto. I understood him perfectly without losing a single word of his conversation: (which never happens to me with either a German or an Englishman), and without any preparation I was able to reply to him in Esperanto and make myself perfectly intelligible to him (which I should not be able to do in English, and only with difficulty in German). Draw your own conclusions! You (and M. Arréat) say that an artificial language would not be easier to learn than a living language (pp. 563 and 596). This is an entire mistake! It is a hundred times easier to learn, because it is regular. Just think of what a marvel of simplicity you have in a language without exceptions! You speak of English as an easy language, because its grammar is a bit simpler than that of other languages. But you forget that it is quite as irregular as others, quite as full of anomalies and want of logic, that the English syntax frequently gives rise to equivocations (for example, in the deplorable habit of omitting the relative pronoun), and that English style swarms with idioms that are unintelligible to an uninitiated foreigner. Reforming English orthography and making it phonetic will not render English easier for foreigners to pronounce; this will simply make it more difficult to read.

M. Arréat says: "Is it not better to learn English, which puts me into touch with 150 millions of men?" Without discussing this number, which seems to me to be exaggerated (the number of those whose mother tongue is English is usually reckoned at 125 millions, and it is evidently unfair to add to this the number of foreigners who may know English, for in this case we must also add to the number of Frenchmen the number of those who can speak French, etc.), I will simply reply to this: I have not and shall never have anything to do with these 125 millions of people; but as trader and scholar I shall have to do with a thousand persons who speak English; but I shall also have to do with a thousand who speak German, with 500 speaking Italian, with 500 speaking Spanish, with 500 speaking Russian, with 200

speaking Dutch, with 100 speaking some Skandinavian language, and so on. What good will English do me with all these other people? Why should a Frenchman and a German, an Italian and a Russian use English in talking with one another rather than the national language of some one of them? Will my knowledge of English enable me to read the literary works and scientific publications of Hungary and Poland? This shows how absurd it is to propose any given living language whatever as an international language. You propose English because it is spoken by 125 millions of people. Why not propose Chinese, which is spoken by 400 millions? If it is a matter of numbers the Chinese ought to carry the day. Is it not better to be in touch with 400 million men than with 125 million? You see, your arguments are refuted by the *reductio ad absurdum*.

You allege that English language and literature are international (p. 595), and I may reply: Neither more nor less than the French literature, the German literature, the Russian literature (Tolstoy), and even the Skandinavian literature (Ibsen). This then is not a peculiar claim of the English, nor an argument in its favor. You think that it is spoken and understood "everywhere"; but go to Italy, for instance: French is the language spoken by all who have business with foreigners, and I have seen Englishmen very much embarrassed where a Frenchman could get along perfectly well. You accuse Mr. Ostwald of having a "national prejudice" against English, and you attempt to find political reasons for this (592). I am not prepared to reply to this in the name of the Germans, but I can affirm as a Frenchman that the animosities which you recall no longer linger among us, and that public opinion is favorable to "a cordial mutual understanding."

Permit me to say to you, that if any one is the victim of national prejudice it is he who proposes his own language as the international medium, and not the one who discards every national tongue, including his own, in favor of the international language. The exclusion of national languages, recorded in our programme, is a clause expressing mutual disinterestedness; it is the indispensable condition for any international agreement, and it may boldly be asserted that if an international language is ever adopted it will of necessity be a neutral one.

I know very well that you think very little of a formal and, as it were, diplomatic agreement, and that you expect the solution of the problem not from an agreement and a vote, but from the natural concurrence of languages. I have no objection; but you forget that the same national prejudices which were opposed to the official adoption of a living language are also invincibly opposed to its natural propagation. You invoke "the struggle for existence," "natural selection," and "the survival of the fittest." But precisely because they do struggle for existence national languages will not abdicate in favor of one from among their own ranks. As for natural selection, it may

just as well occasion the triumph of two or three languages or even of six, as of a single one; the problem will not be solved in this way.

But even this is a chimera: the Germans and Russians have not succeeded after a century in suppressing the Polish tongue, even when it would be to the interest of the Poles to use the language of their conquerors. And yet you expect that the English can ever suppress German, French, or Russian? English will be the universal language only when the whole world is English!—and even then it is not sure of dominion. Greek survived alongside of Latin in the heart of the Roman Empire and was the international language of the entire Orient; Roman emperors, such as Marcus Aurelius and Julian, wrote in Greek. And let me add, that you are dreaming of a universal language, that is, one common to all nations, while we are asking only for an auxiliary language, which will be learned in any case only by a minority in each country and which will leave the national languages as they are, with their natural territory and their peaceable rivalry.

But it is unworthy of philosophers to expect from constraint and violence the solution of a problem in civilisation. It is not by exciting national self-love and interest and by favoring dreams of universal conquest and megalomania that we shall succeed in making humanity better and happier: every appeal to violence is a relapse of civilisation, a return to barbarism. This is particularly true of the problem of an international language. This problem can be solved only by an agreement among civilised nations (whether this understanding be spontaneously developed, or under the official form which we are proposing in order to speed its realisation)—and by the adoption of a neutral idiom, which shall be equally intelligible for all the peoples of European civilisation, and whereby all may communicate together on a perfectly equal footing. Every time that a national language is made use of between two people of different race one of the speakers or writers is more or less sacrificed or subordinated to the other; he feels himself to be in a position of inferiority, and this produces a sentiment of embarrassment and resentment. On the other hand, an auxiliary language is neutral ground, equally unfamiliar, or rather equally familiar to both parties, and one on which they feel themselves equally at ease. Here as everywhere else equality is the condition of fraternity.

LOUIS COUTURAT.

Postscript: I am glad to be able to announce that the "French Philosophical Society" determined on October 27 to support the Commission and appointed as its representative on the same M. Bergson, member of the Academy of Moral Sciences and Professor in the Collège de France, the well known and respected philosopher, who has long approved our undertaking.

EDITORIAL REPLY.

It is not our intention to enter into a controversy with M. Couturat, especially as we cherish toward his endeavor the most kindly sentiments and (in spite of our doubts) wish that his hope of an auxiliary international language might be fulfilled. Accordingly we shall here limit ourselves to a few statements in which M. Couturat has mistaken our attitude.

If an auxiliary international language will prove to be what M. Couturat expects of it we shall be most glad to use it and spread it all over the world. So far we have not yet been convinced of the usefulness of any of the auxiliary international languages, among which Esperanto seems to be the most promising one. Our doubts as to the success of Esperanto do not prevent us, however, from serving the good cause and making the ideal, as well as all the propositions to actualise it, known to our readers. That is all we can do under the present circumstances, and therefore our attitude is one of decided friendliness, not of hostility.

M. Couturat seems to be under the impression that I have proposed English as the international language. That is not the case. I have only used the spread of the English language as an instance how an international language will gradually establish itself and how it will conquer the world. I have not as yet declared myself an adherent to making English the international language. While English is at present the simplest language, I am perfectly aware of its many shortcomings among which I enumerated only a few.

When I said that English is no longer the language of the English but international I did not mean to declare that English is as yet *the* international language. I simply meant that English is spoken by other nations than the English. English is the national language of the United States as well as all the English colonies, which are so many budding nations, and practically also of South Africa. It is a fact that the bitterest enemies of England speak the English tongue. No more vigorous invectives against the English nation and the English government have been published in other languages than in English. English is spoken by the Irish and also by almost half of the anti-English Africanders.

My policy with regard to the adoption of an international language is simply the principle of *laissez faire*. I believe that the best adapted language will naturally conquer in the long run. Should English prove to be the simplest and best medium for an international exchange of thought, let English by its own intrinsic merit become the international language. If there be any other language, artificial or natural, that is superior, let it prove its superiority by being acceptable to the majority of mankind, and I believe that in a free competition in which we give fair chances to every one the fittest will survive.

Most assuredly I believe in the ideal that at last mankind will speak one language, and I trust that the time will come when mankind will have one civilisation, whose forms may differ but which is one in possessing the same moral ideals. Whether or not the different national languages will be preserved is a matter of secondary importance.

So long as the different nationalities still have a hold on the several races of mankind it seems to me that a pasigraphy would be the best and easiest medium of communication, and with this idea in mind, I have proposed my scheme as published in *The Monist*, Vol. XIV, No. 4, which is so far a mere general scheme but could, if completed by competent hands, be condensed into a grammar of a few pages, the principles of which could be learned within an hour by the mere perusal of a leaflet, and thus it would enable any traveller to make his wishes known to strangers while travelling among people with whose language he is absolutely unacquainted, if only he carries a grammar of pasigraphy along in the shape of a small pamphlet, written in the language of the country.

PAUL CARUS.

SUGGESTIONS CONCERNING PASIGRAPHY.

I have been much interested in your suggestion of a new universal language, Pasigraphy, in the July number of *The Monist*. A few suggestions have come to my mind that I send you, thinking perhaps you might consider them while the language is still in an experimental stage.

To begin with, I am heartily in favor of your suggestion and think it altogether the most promising one that I have ever seen for a universal language. I do not think there is any hope of securing the universal adoption of any one language, on account of national jealousies, and I am not even sure that it would be advantageous, since many of the race differences which have been so effective in the building up of our complex civilisation in all its different phases would be wiped out if race and national differences were eliminated. It seems to me, however, that pasigraphy might well be tied up to English pronunciation in case it were to be widely used, English being so direct a language that few modifications would be required to make its grammar scientific. Still, I suppose a German could read pasigraphy if he wanted to, though it would never seem like German.

This brings up the matter of a phonetic system to accompany pasigraphy. For proper names some phonetic system must be used, and if the English pronunciation be given to pasigraphy the pronunciation could be figured in this phonetic alphabet for the use of beginners. I have not looked up Alexander Graham Bell's Scientific Alphabet, but it might perhaps be useful for this purpose.

The matter of fundamental importance, however, which occurs to me